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SUBJECT: TURKEY: REALITY TV SHOW RATINGS ON THE RISE

¶1. (U) As the Turkish public grows weary of the complicated and discouraging political developments dominating the news and talk shows, they are turning increasingly to reality TV shows for entertainment. TRT Program Director Nisan Budalalik has seen a marked increase in viewership of American-style "reality shows."

-- "Kasimpasali Cocuk" (The Guy from Kasimpasha): Ali T, a combative illiterate comic "thug" uses fake journalistic credentials to put Turkey's leading figures into uncomfortable situations. One recent episode showed the host trying to head-clink Nationalist Action Party (MHP) Devlet Bahceli before being tackled by bodyguards. In another, the interviewer baffled Chief of the Turkish General Staff General Buyukanit into stunned silence when he asserted that the term "Turkmen" was obviously an Anglicism for "Turkish men" and therefore the cherished kinship between Turks and their ethnic kin in Northern Iraq was an American plot to trip up Turkey.

-- "Who Wants to Be a Turkish Millionaire?": Plucky young grads from top universities compete to win a job with Mehmet Emin Karamehmet. Episode 1 features the two teams -- CimBom and Fener -- competing to sell the largest number of simits in Istanbul's Taksim Square. CimBom's manager Mehmet Ali leads his team in implementing a flashy song-and-dance strategy, but is upstaged by Fener, which uses the time-honored "Simit-yell" technique to coast to victory. Karamehmet faults Mehmet Ali for poor management, but ultimately determines that team member Umur Azoza's combative personality sowed seeds of discord that undid CimBom's unity, leading to the loss. "Umur Azoza, KOVULDUN!"

-- "The Pious Life": Kubra Gul and Esra Erdogan join the staff of Club Med Antalya. In the most recent episode, Kubra accuses Esra of stealing her signature double knot twist headscarf method. Greek shipping heir Stavros Niachos made a guest appearance.

-- "Turkey's Next Top Headscarf Model": A catwalk showdown between models sporting brightly colored silk "turbans" and traditional Anatolian scarves tied under the chin turned ugly when a discussion among the all-male panel of judges erupted into a fistfight.

-- "Fear Factor: Turkey": A recent episode featured a

profusely sweating contestant enduring a university lecture flanked by two headscarf-wearing students.

-- "Pimp My Tofash": A team of hipsters redesign 80-horsepower jalopies to sport airbrushed wolves, automatically unfurling crescent-and-star banners, and horns that play the first few bars of the Independence March.

¶2. (U) Some of the shows have engendered substantial political dispute.

-- "The Turkish Bachelor": When the bachelor unexpectedly proposed to the homeliest bachelorette, who professed her desire to have "at least" three children, Republican People's Party (CHP) chairman Baykal immediately reacted in a press conference calling the show "rigged by (Prime Minister) Erdogan." Erdogan in turn blamed the Dogan Media Group for creating Bachelor tensions. Devlet Bahceli raised his fist in the air, only to trip when he tried to take a step back.

-- Hit show "Big Brother: Kandil" prompted Baykal to call for a national boycott. According to Baykal, the Turkish public had no idea that the footage taken for the reality show allegedly came from actionable intelligence supplied by the US as part of the larger US-Turkish intelligence-sharing cooperation. Per Baykal, "This is proof the United States is meddling in our entertainment affairs, imposing cultural domination, and is using its pressure to influence the outcome of the show."

¶3. (U) Budalalik notes that some of the shows have run into legal problems. The Radio and Television Authority imposed a 30-day ban on "Next Top Headscarf Model" for violating RTUK regulation 3406.5(b) on lighting requirements. Prime

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Minister Erdogan has charged that the Kasimpasali Cocuk character's apparent dull-wittedness is insulting to residents of that neighborhood, and is trying to amend the Penal Code to make "insult to the Prime Minister's hometown" a crime.

¶4. (U) April Fool! Nisan Budalalik!

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